



POWER RELATIONS IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN LECTURERS AND STUDENTS IN FINAL PROJECT SUPERVISION AT ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS COLLEGES

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of power relations between lecturers and students during thesis supervision at an Islamic Higher Education Institution (PTKI) in Indonesia. Drawing on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research analyzes text, discursive practices, and social practices from a series of WhatsApp conversations between students and supervisors. To strengthen the theoretical framework, the study integrates Foucault's notion of disciplinary power and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and symbolic violence. Data were collected from authentic digital conversations during supervision and analyzed through three stages: reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that lecturers often use directive and concise language to regulate supervision, while students consistently employ politeness strategies such as greetings, apologies, and gratitude. This asymmetrical relationship reflects not only linguistic domination but also the institutional and cultural structures of PTKI, where lecturers hold greater cultural and symbolic capital. Furthermore, symbolic violence is evident as students internalize hierarchical relations and accept inequality as natural. The study concludes that supervision is not merely an academic process but also a site of power reproduction. The implications highlight the need for more dialogic supervisory practices to balance authority and agency, as well as institutional support to ensure democratic communication in academic supervision.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Power Relations, Thesis Supervision, Fairclough, Foucault, Bourdieu

I. INTRODUCTIONS

Higher education is an important arena for the formation of students' academic, professional, and social identities. At the final stage of their studies, students are required to write a thesis as one of the graduation requirements. A thesis not only serves as a scientific work but also as a medium for students to demonstrate their critical, analytical, and systematic thinking skills. Therefore, the thesis supervision process becomes one of the most intensive and decisive forms of academic interaction between lecturers and students.

In the context of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam/PTKI), thesis supervision has distinctive characteristics. The interaction between lecturers and students is not limited to the academic domain but is also framed by religious norms, etiquette of politeness, and a culture of respect for authority. These aspects make lecturer–student relationships at PTKI more complex compared to those in general universities. Religious norms, for instance, are reflected in the use of greetings in every communication; meanwhile, the culture of politeness is evident in the way students greet, ask for permission, or express gratitude.

On the other hand, lecturers hold strong authority in the thesis supervision process. They do not merely act as academic facilitators but also as evaluators of feasibility, schedulers, and



final decision-makers throughout the supervision process. This position places students in a subordinated situation, in which they must adapt to the directions, schedules, and procedures set by their lecturers. Such conditions reflect unequal power relations between the two parties—relations that are often unrecognized by students as they are already embedded in the academic habitus of PTKI.

Field observations show that students frequently begin communication with religious greetings, apologies, and expressions of gratitude as forms of politeness. Conversely, lecturers generally use brief, instructive language, directly setting supervision schedules and procedures. This asymmetrical communication pattern is accepted by students as something natural, even without attempts at negotiation. Such a condition demonstrates that thesis supervision is not merely an academic space but also an arena for the reproduction of power that normalizes hierarchical relations between lecturers and students.

Several previous studies have highlighted similar dynamics. Syafi'i et al. (2024) found that academic supervision in higher education tends to be instructive and closes off spaces for dialogue. Sumintak & Idi (2022) emphasized that power relations in higher education can generate forms of symbolic violence, discouraging students from voicing criticism. Meanwhile, Kobayashi (2019), in the Japanese context, demonstrated that lecturers' power can be productive if built through mutual understanding and two-way communication. However, most of these studies were conducted in general universities and rarely examined the PTKI context with its distinctive religious values and culture of politeness.

This is where the research gap lies. To date, there has been very limited research specifically analyzing power relations in thesis supervision at PTKI, particularly through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Yet, the religious context, politeness ethics, and the strong symbolic dominance of lecturers in PTKI create a unique dynamic different from that of general universities. Previous studies have mostly focused on academic supervision in general, without examining how language, habitus, and institutional structures intertwine to shape power relations in PTKI thesis supervision.

Based on this background, this study has three main objectives. First, to identify the representations of power relations in student–lecturer conversations during thesis supervision. Second, to explain how institutional structures and cultural habitus influence communication patterns between the two parties. Third, to offer new insights into the implications of power relations in the PTKI context, thereby providing a foundation for building more dialogical and egalitarian academic communication. To achieve these objectives, a strong theoretical foundation on concepts of power, language, and social practice is required as the analytical framework of this study. Accordingly, the following section presents a review of relevant literature as the conceptual grounding of this research.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for uncovering the relationship between language, power, and social practice in academic interactions, particularly within the context of thesis supervision. CDA allows the researcher to analyze conversational texts, how these texts are produced and interpreted, and how they reflect broader social structures. Thus, this approach is considered the most relevant for understanding power relations that emerge in lecturer–student communication.

The locus of this study is the State Islamic Institute (Institut Agama Islam Negeri/IAIN) Parepare, one of the State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in South Sulawesi. This institution was selected because of its distinctiveness in integrating academic traditions



with religious values. The PTKIN context situates academic interaction not only within scholarly demands but also within norms of politeness and a culture of respect for authority. This makes IAIN Parepare a representative site for examining power relations in thesis supervision.

The research data were drawn from conversations between students and lecturers conducted through WhatsApp, one of the dominant modes of communication in thesis supervision in the digital era. These conversations were chosen because they reflect real communication occurring outside formal settings yet still carry academic consequences. Data were collected from several students undergoing supervision at IAIN Parepare, with careful attention to research ethics, such as maintaining the confidentiality of informants' identities and obtaining consent before using the conversations for analysis.

Data analysis was carried out in three stages, following the model of Miles & Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, conversations relevant to power relations were selected; in the display stage, excerpts were organized according to thematic categories; and in the conclusion drawing stage, communication patterns were interpreted to identify forms of domination, resistance, and negotiation.

For the analytical framework, this study integrates three critical theories. First, Fairclough's CDA with its three dimensions: textual analysis (word choices, greetings, requests, commands), discursive practice (the production and consumption of texts on WhatsApp), and social practice (the relationship to religious norms and politeness culture at PTKI). Second, Foucault's theory of power, particularly the concepts of discipline, normalization, and the panopticon, to explain how lecturers' power operates through rules, schedules, and academic systems, leading students to conform even without direct coercion. Third, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and symbolic violence, to explain how students accept lecturers' dominance as natural, while lecturers hold authority because of their greater cultural and symbolic capital.

By combining Fairclough, Foucault, and Bourdieu, this study not only examines power relations at the linguistic level but also links them to underlying mechanisms of power embedded in social structures and academic culture. Power is present not only in lecturers' direct instructions but also in the internalization of religious norms, politeness, and institutional structures of PTKI.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies source and method triangulation. Conversational data were compared with supporting documents, such as academic regulations and institutional policies, and verified through discussions with language and education experts at IAIN Parepare. Through this methodology, the study is expected to generate a more comprehensive understanding of how power operates in thesis supervision within PTKIN, particularly at IAIN Parepare.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research findings reveal consistent patterns of power relations in the conversations between lecturers and students. The analysis is based on several representative cases that demonstrate variations in communication situations during thesis supervision at IAIN Parepare.

Case	Student's Utterance Summary	Lecturer's Response	Power Relation Analysis
1. Request for consultation time	Student RN opens with greetings, an apology, and thanks.	Short instruction: "Come to LP2M at 1 p.m. sharp."	Fairclough: Contrast between lengthy student utterance vs. brief lecturer reply shows imbalance. Foucault: Lecturer controls



Case	Student's Utterance Summary	Lecturer's Response	Power Relation Analysis
			time/place → disciplinary power. Bourdieu: Student's politeness habitus reinforces subordination.
2. Delivering seminar invitation	Student RM politely asks permission, goes to the wrong room, then apologizes.	Direct instruction: "Just take it to TIPD."	Fairclough: Student's utterance full of mitigation, lecturer instructive. Foucault: Lecturer's power directs student's action. Bourdieu: Internalized compliance habitus; student blames self despite miscommunication.
3. Request for revision signature	Student asks about lecturer's arrival time to wait.	Reply: "Usually after 4 p.m."	Fairclough: Student's negotiation does not change outcome. Foucault: Lecturer controls temporal interaction. Bourdieu: Lecturer's symbolic capital compels student adjustment.
4. Change of consultation schedule	Lecturer unilaterally changes schedule. Student replies: "Yes, ma'am."	Direct instruction to change schedule.	Fairclough: Student passive. Foucault: Normalization mechanism, student submits to lecturer's schedule. Bourdieu: Symbolic violence → domination accepted without resistance.
5. Consultation after academic meeting	Student asks about consultation time after a meeting.	"We'll meet afterwards at LP2M."	Fairclough: Discourse directed by lecturer → student only agrees. Foucault: Institutional agenda (meeting) reinforces authority. Bourdieu: Politeness habitus → student willing to wait.
6. Instruction via Sisfo system	Student asked to upload file via Sisfo; clarifies in local language.	"Submit consultation through Sisfo, upload the file."	Fairclough: Technology as instrument of administrative discourse. Foucault: Power dispersed through digital system. Bourdieu: Lecturer's technical capital + institutional system reinforce domination.

The first case illustrates the interaction between student RN and the lecturer regarding a request for consultation time. The student opens the conversation with a religious greeting, an apology, and an expression of gratitude, representing a politeness strategy. The lecturer responds with a short instruction: "Come to LP2M at 1 p.m. sharp because there's another activity afterwards." Textually, there is a contrast between the lengthy student utterance and the lecturer's brief response. According to Fairclough, this linguistic form reflects an unequal power position. From Foucault's perspective, the lecturer exercises disciplinary power by determining time and place, leaving no room for negotiation.

The second case involves student RM, who wants to deliver a seminar invitation. The student uses greetings, permission, and polite language, while the lecturer gives direct instructions about the location: "Just take it to TIPD. New Lab Building, behind the library, 2nd floor." When the student goes to the wrong room, they add an apology, which shows the internalization of a compliance habitus. In Bourdieu's framework, this demonstrates symbolic domination, where the student accepts the mistake as their responsibility, not as a result of the lecturer's brief communication.

The third case concerns a request for a revision signature. The student attempts to negotiate by asking when the lecturer will be on campus. However, the lecturer maintains full control by replying: "Usually after 4 p.m." Fairclough's analysis at the level of discursive practice shows that, although the student tries to expand the communication space, the outcome still reflects the lecturer's dominance in determining the interaction mechanism. From Foucault's perspective, this exemplifies power operating at the administrative and temporal level, where the student must adjust their rhythm to the lecturer's schedule.



The fourth case shows the lecturer unilaterally changing the consultation schedule: “I’ve moved today’s consultation to 10 a.m.; every Monday at 10, Thursday still looking for a free time.” The student replies briefly: “Yes, ma’am.” There is no resistance or negotiation. Bourdieu describes this as symbolic violence, where domination is accepted as natural. The student’s habitus, shaped by politeness norms in Islamic higher education, prevents them from questioning the lecturer’s decision, even though it affects their own time flexibility.

The fifth case occurs when the lecturer can only meet after an academic meeting. The student adjusts to the lecturer’s agenda without objection. At the level of social practice, this reflects how the institutional structure of Islamic higher education strengthens the lecturer’s position. Meetings, academic schedules, and bureaucratic agendas serve as instruments of power that limit the student’s space. From Foucault’s perspective, institutional structures function as normalization mechanisms that make lecturer dominance appear natural.

The sixth case involves the use of a digital system (Sisfo). The lecturer asks the student to upload a file through the system and then checks whether the submission was successful. The student responds with clarification in the local language: “Yes. Thank you, ma’am.” The presence of technology here demonstrates that power is distributed not only through direct interaction but also via digital administrative instruments. This aligns with Fairclough’s view that technological media are part of discursive practices that are not neutral, but instead reproduce power relations.

From the analysis of these six cases, a general pattern emerges: students consistently use politeness strategies through greetings, apologies, and thanks, while lecturers tend to use brief, instructive utterances. This pattern reinforces the lecturer’s power, which extends beyond academic content to include control over time, place, and administrative mechanisms. The norms of religiosity and bureaucratic structures in Islamic higher education further strengthen the lecturer’s position, while the student’s habitus shapes compliance that prevents resistance.

By combining the perspectives of Fairclough, Foucault, and Bourdieu, thesis supervision can be understood not only as an academic process but also as an arena of power reproduction. Students’ polite language, lecturers’ instructions, and institutional structures work together to create subtle inequalities. Foucault explains discipline and normalization; Fairclough highlights how texts, discursive practices, and social practices reflect imbalances; and Bourdieu shows how habitus and symbolic violence lead students to accept lecturer domination without resistance.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that power relations in thesis supervision at IAIN Parepare cannot be separated from the hierarchical communication patterns between lecturers and students. Students consistently demonstrate politeness through religious greetings, apologies, and expressions of gratitude, while lecturers use brief and instructive language that reinforces their authority. This imbalance is evident in the contrast between the length of utterances, the one-directional flow of communication, and the lecturer’s dominance in determining the time, place, and mechanisms of supervision.

Analysis using the frameworks of Fairclough, Foucault, and Bourdieu reveals that power relations operate simultaneously at three levels. At the textual level, student discourse signals subordination, whereas lecturer discourse signals domination. At the discursive practice level, interactions occur with minimal room for negotiation, as students tend to follow instructions without resistance. At the social practice level, religious norms, politeness culture, and the institutional structures of Islamic higher education (PTKI) reinforce mechanisms of



domination. These findings indicate that thesis supervision is not only an academic space but also an arena for the institutional reproduction of power.

The theoretical implication of this research is the importance of integrating the perspectives of Fairclough, Foucault, and Bourdieu to understand power relations in higher education. Fairclough helps uncover the linguistic and discursive aspects, Foucault highlights mechanisms of discipline and normalization, while Bourdieu explains habitus and symbolic violence that make domination accepted without resistance. The combination of these three theories provides a more comprehensive understanding of how power simultaneously operates through language, institutions, and culture.

The practical implication is the need for lecturers to be aware of the power position inherent in their role as thesis supervisors. Excessive domination risks limiting student participation and reducing opportunities for them to develop academic independence. Therefore, a more dialogical pattern of supervision is needed, one that provides space for students to voice their opinions and fosters more egalitarian academic relations.

In addition, this study carries contextual implications for PTKI. The religious norms and politeness culture that characterize PTKI can continue to be upheld as positive values, but at the same time, they need to be balanced with critical awareness to prevent their transformation into instruments of symbolic domination. PTKI can design more flexible supervision policies and optimize digital technologies not only as tools of administrative control but also as means of fostering two-way, participatory communication.

Thus, this research not only uncovers the power relations within thesis supervision at PTKI but also contributes to theoretical development, offers practical reflection for lecturers and students, and provides policy recommendations for institutions. While power relations cannot be completely eliminated, they can be managed so that thesis supervision becomes a more dialogical, productive, and emancipatory academic space.

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